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DISHA 2.0: Restructuring India's Access to Justice Mission

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WHY IN NEWS

Around June 24, 2026, the Minister of State (Independent Charge) for Law and Justice, Arjun Ram Meghwal, approved the continuation of the access-to-justice mission in a restructured form as a Central Sector Scheme cleared for five years (April 1, 2026 to March 31, 2031) with an outlay of Rs 255 crore and 100% Gross Budgetary Support.

WHAT IS DISHA 2.0?

DISHA 2.0 is the restructured second phase of the Department of Justice's flagship access-to-justice programme. The original DISHA ran for five years (2021-2026); the new cycle realigns the scheme with the [XVI Finance Commission](https://ujjyari.com/terms/finance-commission/) period and folds existing legal-aid initiatives into a single, technology-driven architecture.

Key Features at a Glance

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FEATURE	DETAIL
Full name	Designing Innovative Solutions for Holistic Access to Justice (DISHA) 2.0
Type	Central Sector Scheme (100% Gross Budgetary Support)
Period	April 1, 2026 to March 31, 2031 (5 years)
Outlay	Rs 255 crore
Implementing body	Department of Justice, Ministry of Law and Justice
Approved by	MoS (I/C) Law and Justice, Arjun Ram Meghwal
New component	VIDHI Sanjeevani
Target	About 3 crore beneficiaries by 2031

A **Central Sector Scheme** is funded and implemented entirely by the Union Government, unlike a Centrally Sponsored Scheme where states share the cost. The 100% Gross Budgetary Support (GBS) here means the full Rs 255 crore is met from the Union Budget.

The VIDHI Sanjeevani Component

The headline addition in DISHA 2.0 is **VIDHI (Vision for Integrated Delivery of Harmonized Legal Initiatives) Sanjeevani**. It is conceived as a centralised digital platform that harmonises the scheme's separate legal-aid streams and brings in technology-driven delivery, including an AI-powered **Nyaya Setu** chatbot to guide citizens through pre-litigation advice and legal information. The aim is to move from siloed programmes to a single, integrated justice-delivery backbone.

THE CONSTITUTIONAL BASIS FOR ACCESS TO JUSTICE

Access to justice is not a charitable concession (<https://ujivari.com/vocab/concession/>); it is a constitutional commitment woven through the Preamble and enforced by the judiciary. The **Preamble** promises justice that is social, economic and political. This is operationalised through a cluster of provisions read together.

PROVISION	NATURE	WHAT IT SECURES
Preamble	Founding vision	Justice: social, economic and political
Article 14	Fundamental Right	Equality before law and equal protection of laws
Article 21	Fundamental Right	Right to life and personal liberty (read to include free legal aid and speedy trial)
Article 39A	Directive Principle	Equal justice and free legal aid; inserted by the 42nd Amendment, 1976

Article 39A directs the State to ensure that the operation of the legal system promotes justice on a basis of equal opportunity, and to provide free legal aid so that no citizen is denied justice by reason of economic or other disabilities. Though a Directive Principle, the Supreme Court fused it with Articles 14 and 21 to make free legal aid an enforceable right.

Hussainara Khatoon (1979): The Turning Point

In **Hussainara Khatoon v. State of Bihar (1979)**, the Supreme Court confronted the plight of thousands of undertrials in Bihar who had languished in jail for years, often longer than the maximum sentence their alleged offences carried. The Court held that the **right to free legal aid and a speedy trial are part of the right to life and personal liberty under Article 21**, reading Article 39A into a fundamental right. This judgment is the doctrinal (<https://ujijari.com/vocab/doctrinal/>) anchor for every modern legal-aid scheme, including DISHA. Parliament gave the mandate institutional shape through the **Legal Services Authorities Act, 1987**.

THE LEGAL-AID ARCHITECTURE

DISHA does not work in isolation. It sits within an ecosystem of statutory (<https://ujijari.com/vocab/statutory/>) bodies and delivery programmes.

BODY / PROGRAMME	BASIS	FUNCTION
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NALSA (National Legal Services Authority)	Legal Services Authorities Act, 1987	Apex (https://ujjyari.com/vocab/apex/) body framing policies and schemes for free legal services; constitutes legal services authorities at state, district and taluk levels
Tele-Law (https://ujjyari.com/terms/tele-law/)	Department of Justice	Free pre-litigation legal advice via Common Service Centres at Gram Panchayat level, reaching the unreached
Nyaya Bandhu	Department of Justice	Pro bono legal services connecting eligible citizens with volunteer advocates for free assistance and representation
Legal Literacy and Awareness	Department of Justice	Spreads legal awareness through ministries, law universities, civil society and media

NALSA, headed by a sitting Supreme Court judge as Executive Chairman, is the constitutional-statutory keystone, while Tele-Law and Nyaya Bandhu are the front-line delivery channels now consolidated under the DISHA umbrella.

WHAT DISHA 1.0 ACHIEVED

The first phase (2021-2026) demonstrated the scale at which pre-litigation legal services can be delivered. As on **May 31, 2026**, the original DISHA had reached a cumulative **about 2.37 crore beneficiaries** through its Tele-Law, Nyaya Bandhu and legal-awareness streams. This proven reach is the foundation on which DISHA 2.0 sets its more ambitious target of roughly **3 crore beneficiaries by 2031**.

WHY ACCESS TO JUSTICE MATTERS

A right without a remedy is hollow. For the poor, illiterate and marginalised, the real barriers to justice are cost, distance, awareness and procedural complexity rather than the absence of law. Pre-litigation advice prevents avoidable disputes from clogging courts, reduces the undertrial population that Hussainara Khatoon exposed, and converts paper rights into lived entitlements. Schemes like DISHA also support **Sustainable Development** (<https://ujjyari.com/terms/sustainable-development/>) **Goal 16** (peace, justice and strong institutions) by building accountable and inclusive institutions.

ANALYSIS AND WAY FORWARD

The restructuring is significant for three reasons. First, **integration**: VIDHI Sanjeevani's single platform tackles the long-standing problem of fragmented legal-aid schemes that citizens struggled to navigate. Second, **technology with caution**: an AI chatbot can democratise basic legal information, but its outputs must be supervised so that vulnerable users are not misadvised on matters with serious consequences. Third,

financing: a Rs 255 crore outlay over five years is modest against a target of 3 crore beneficiaries, so cost-effective digital delivery and convergence (<https://ujjyari.com/vocab/convergence/>) with NALSA's network will be decisive.

The way forward lies in linking DISHA's pre-litigation streams seamlessly with NALSA's post-litigation legal aid, ensuring last-mile delivery through Common Service Centres reaches the most remote Gram Panchayats, strengthening the quality and accountability of empanelled advocates, and building grievance-redress (<https://ujjyari.com/vocab/redress/>) safeguards around the AI layer. Genuine access to justice will be measured not by registrations but by disputes resolved and undertrials freed.

UPSC RELEVANCE

Prelims: DISHA 2.0 is a Central Sector Scheme (100% GBS, Rs 255 crore, 2026-31) of the Department of Justice; VIDHI Sanjeevani is its new digital component; Article 39A (Directive Principle, 42nd Amendment 1976) provides for free legal aid; NALSA is constituted under the Legal Services Authorities Act, 1987; Tele-Law and Nyaya Bandhu are key delivery programmes.

Mains (GS2 - Governance / Welfare schemes / Vulnerable sections): Examine how schemes like DISHA 2.0 translate the Directive Principle in Article 39A into effective access to justice. Discuss the role of technology and the legal-aid architecture in bridging the justice gap for marginalised sections.

Ethics / GS4 angle: Access to justice reflects the constitutional value of equality and the ethical principle of fairness; the deployment of AI in legal advice raises questions of accountability and protection of the vulnerable.

FACTS CORNER

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DISHA 2.0, Designing Innovative Solutions for Holistic Access to Justice; Central Sector Scheme, Rs 255 crore, 100% GBS, period April 1, 2026 to March 31, 2031.

VIDHI Sanjeevani, new component; “Vision for Integrated Delivery of Harmonized Legal Initiatives”; centralised digital platform with an AI-powered Nyaya Setu chatbot.

Article 39A, Directive Principle providing equal justice and free legal aid; inserted by the 42nd Constitutional Amendment, 1976.

Hussainara Khatoon v. State of Bihar (1979), read free legal aid and speedy trial into Article 21.

NALSA, National Legal Services Authority, constituted under the Legal Services Authorities Act, 1987.

Implementing body, Department of Justice, Ministry of Law and Justice.

DISHA 1.0, about 2.37 crore cumulative beneficiaries as on May 31, 2026; DISHA 2.0 targets about 3 crore by 2031.

Sources: Department of Justice (<https://doj.gov.in>), Press Information Bureau (<https://pib.gov.in>), NALSA (<https://nalsa.gov.in>)

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